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CASUALTY!

Peter Viney

Gail is a nurse at Midhurst Hospital. One Saturday evening there is an emergency – Alex Hayle, the singer, has had a terrible car crash. He is in a coma and has a broken back. His manager moves him from Midhurst to a private hospital. A few months later Gail sees Alex on television – but is it really him?

Cover illustration by Richard Ison

750 headwords

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS


Oxford English

9780194219587
Gail, you must have a rest. Go and have a coffee.'

Gail looked round. Dr Kennedy was standing behind her. She looked down at the man in the bed.

'He's OK,' said Dr Kennedy. 'I'm here now. Go on, you're tired.'

Gail smiled. 'Are you sure?' she said.

'You've been here for five hours. You can't work all night! Come back in twenty minutes.'

'But it's Saturday night. We're always very busy on Saturdays ...'

'Go on!' said the doctor.

Gail looked at him. He was tired, too. Saturday was always busy in the casualty department. There were road accidents, fights, and all the other emergencies.

'All right,' she said. 'I'm going.'

She walked to the coffee machine, and bought a cup of coffee. Then she went to the small office for nurses, and sat down. The coffee wasn't very good. She didn't like coffee from machines. Gail took a newspaper from the desk, and opened it. She looked at one or two stories. They weren't very interesting. Then she stopped. There was a big picture of Alex Hayle on the page. She liked
his new record . . . What was it? . . . Ah, yes, Midnight Party. She read the story.

Gail looked at her watch. The concert finished at midnight. It was half past twelve now. It was Sunday morning. Gail looked at the next page. Suddenly she heard the bell. There was an emergency!
She hurried back into the casualty department. Dr Kennedy was running towards the door.

'An ambulance is arriving. There's been a car crash!' he shouted. 'Come on!'

Gail ran after him. Two ambulance men were coming through the door with a stretcher. She looked down. There was a man on the stretcher. She couldn't see his face. There was a lot of blood.

'Hurry! He's broken his back, I think. And he's cut his face. He needs more blood,' shouted one of the ambulance men. 'Bring some blood, quickly!'
'His next of kin ... his wife, or his father or mother,' said Gail. 'We need the information, because ...'

'He hasn't got a wife. His mother and father are ... are dead. Write my name down. I'm his manager.'

'Has he got any brothers or sisters? We need the name of someone in his family.'

'Look, darling. He hasn't got any family. Do you understand? Put my name.'

The short man's face was very near Gail. She could smell the cigar and she could smell drink, too.

'All right,' she said, 'what's your name and address?'

Gail walked away. Tucker and his friend weren't worried about Alex. They were worried about the ten million pound tour. She went to the lift. The door opened, and Dr Kennedy came out.

'How is he?' she asked.

'It's not very good,' he said. 'Where are the two men who are with him?'

'They're over there,' said Gail. 'They're not very friendly!'

'Right,' said Dr Kennedy. He went towards Mr Tucker. 'Are you the doctor?' said Tucker.

'Yes, I'm Dr Kenn ...'

'Right. I want a private hospital, not this one,' said Tucker. 'When can we move him?'

'You can't,' said Dr Kennedy. 'He's broken his back, and he's in a coma. You can't move him.'

'That's Alex Hayle!' said Tucker. 'He can't stay in a National Health Service hospital. We need the best doctors. We need a private hospital.'

'He's got the best doctor,' said Dr Kennedy. 'Dr Casey is a specialist, and she's ...'

'And she's working in a little hospital, in a little town,' said Tucker. 'Look, my friend, Alex Hayle is an international star. He sells millions of records every year, and ...'

Dr Kennedy stopped him.

'And he's in a coma, he's in this hospital, and you're not moving him. Good night.'

He walked quickly back to the lift.

'What's wrong with him?' said Tucker. 'Hey! Nurse! Can we have some coffee or something?'

Gail smiled. She was getting some tea for an old woman in the next room. The old lady's husband was in the hospital.

'Mr Tucker,' she said, 'this is a hospital, not a restaurant. There's a machine over there.'

3 Room 534

Gail had to work until six o'clock the next morning. When she got back to the Nurses' Home, her friends were having breakfast. She told them about the car crash.

'Wow!' said Penny. 'Alex Hayle! I've got all of his records! Which room is he in?'

'I don't know,' said Gail. 'Look, it's half past six. I'm going to bed! Good night ... or is it "Good morning"?'

Gail woke up in the middle of the afternoon. She had to begin work at ten o'clock on Sunday evening. She turned on the television while she was eating. She wanted to hear the news. There was a video of Alex Hayle on the five o'clock news. Gail turned up the sound.

'That was Alex Hayle, and he was singing Midnight Party. Alex is in hospital in Midhurst. He crashed his
car after his concert last night. We spoke to his manager, Clarence Tucker, outside the hospital.'

Gail sat up in her chair. There was Tucker on the television.

'... I've just been with Alex. He's going to be all right. He was sitting up in bed and he was smiling. He can't finish the concert tour, but don't worry! He's going to do another tour next year. I want to thank everyone for the flowers and letters. Alex is looking at them. Thank you.'

Gail turned off the television. Alex was going to be all right! But he broke his back. He was in a coma! She couldn't understand. He was sitting up in bed!

At that moment Penny came in.

'Hey! Gail!' said Penny. 'I saw Alex! He's in Room 534. I work on the fifth floor, you know. It's ...'

'And is he sitting up and smiling?' said Gail.

Penny sat down.

'What?' she said.

'Is he sitting up and smiling?'

'He's in a coma,' said Penny. 'He broke his back. You know that.'

'His manager, Mr Tucker, was on television. He said "Alex is sitting up and smiling".'

'Ah!' said Penny. 'I understand. Dr Casey spoke to us today. We mustn't speak to the newspapers or television about Alex. Tucker spoke to the head of the hospital. You can't see Alex's face, you know. He cut it in the crash. And he can't move. It's terrible.'

It wasn't very busy on Sunday evening. At eleven o'clock Gail had to go to the fifth floor for Dr Kennedy. She had to get some medicine. She got the medicine, and walked back to the lift. Then she saw the tall man in the black coat. He was standing outside Room 534. She stopped for a moment, then walked over to him.

'Hello,' she said. 'What are you doing here?'

'Oh, it's you. I'm waiting here. Mr Tucker doesn't want any reporters or TV people near Alex,' said the man.

'Ah,' said Gail. 'Excuse me, I'm just going to have a look at him.' She thought quickly. 'Dr Kennedy asked me to look at him at eleven o'clock. I'm late.'

'The nurse on this floor looked at him ten minutes ago,' said the man.

'I know,' said Gail. 'Excuse me.'
She opened the door and went in. She closed the door carefully behind her. There was Alex in the bed. He was in a coma. She couldn't see his face. There were a lot of bandages round it. She looked at the machines round the bed. They were all right.

She opened the door, and walked out. The head nurse from the fifth floor was there.

'Nurse,' she said, 'can I speak to you? In my office?'

Gail looked at the man in the black coat. He was smiling.

'Er, yes,' said Gail.

They went to the head nurse's office.

'Sit down,' said the head nurse. 'What were you doing in Room 534?'

'Why?' asked Gail.

'You don't work on this floor. Mr Hayle can't have visitors. This afternoon about twenty nurses came to this floor. They wanted to see him. This is a hospital, not a rock concert.'

'I'm from the casualty department,' said Gail. 'I was there last night ... when they brought him in. I was worried about him. I had to come here for some medicine. Dr Kennedy wanted it ... I just looked in the room. I'm sorry.'

'I see,' said the head nurse. 'Well, don't do it again. Do you understand?'

'Yes,' said Gail. 'I am sorry.'

She left the office, and went towards the lift. The man in the black coat smiled at her.

'Good evening, Nurse,' he said, 'and goodbye. I'm not going to see you on this floor again. Right?"
4 A new face

It was two weeks later. Gail was working in the office in the casualty department. The telephone rang. Gail picked it up.

'Casualty,' she said.

'Hello, this is Dr Casey. 'Could I speak to Dr Kennedy, please?'

'Just a minute,' said Gail. She went and got Dr Kennedy. He picked up the phone. Gail sat down again.

'Kennedy here ... Oh hello, Josephine ... What? ... But they can't! ... They have? ... When? ... No! ... And where are they taking him? ... Why can't they tell you? ... That's terrible! ... Yes, yes ... See you later.'

He put the phone down. He was very angry. Gail could see that. She waited.

'That was Dr Casey,' he said. 'Mr Tucker has taken Alex Hayle from the hospital.'

'But he's in a coma!' said Gail.

'Yes. They took him in a private ambulance. They're going to a private hospital. Dr Casey is very angry.'

Gail often thought about Alex. One evening, a few months later, she was watching television in the Nurses' Home. It was a rock music programme.

'And now we've got the new record from Alex Hayle! It's *Saturday Night*, and here is Alex. He's going to sing it for us. Alex had a car crash a few months ago, and he's had plastic surgery ... so it's a new face for a New Face! You remember, Alex was in the group New Face two years ago. And here he is ... Alex Hayle!'

The music started. And there was Alex! Well, his hair was the same, his clothes were the same. But it was a new face. Plastic surgery? Yes, he cut his face badly ... but what about the broken back? What about the coma? Gail listened carefully. Then she stood up. 'That's not Alex,' she said. 'It's not!'

Then she thought. 'But where is Alex? What's happened to him?'

When Penny came in that evening, Gail spoke to her about Alex. Penny knew all about it.
'It was in the newspaper,' she said. 'They took Alex to Switzerland. He had plastic surgery from a specialist in Geneva.'

'But he broke his back! You know that, Penny. You saw him.'

'Well, he's all right now,' said Penny. 'I've seen him on television ... He was dancing!'

5 An old friend

The next Saturday Gail was shopping in Midhurst.

She was looking for some new trousers. She went into a clothes shop in the High Street, and looked at some pairs of jeans. Fifty-five pounds! Everything was expensive. She stopped and listened to the music in the shop. Saturday Night. They were playing the record in all the other clothes shops that afternoon, too. 'It's going to be a big hit, maybe number one,' thought Gail.

'Gail! Hi! I haven't seen you for years!'

Gail looked round. 'Diane!' she said. 'How are you?'

Diane Partridge was an old friend. They were student nurses together, five years before.

'I'm fine,' said Diane. 'Come and have a coffee. I want to hear all your news.'

They went to a cafe, and got two coffees. Gail opened her handbag.

'No!' said Diane. 'I'll pay. Really.'

They sat down at a table. Diane had three or four shopping bags. She put them under the table.

'New clothes,' she said.

'What are you doing now?' asked Gail.

'I'm working at a small private hospital. It's near Frampton. It's a wonderful job. The hospital's very expensive, and they pay me very well.'

They talked for half an hour. Diane was telling Gail about her job.

'... I like the job, but it's very sad sometimes,' she said. 'I'm looking after a young man. He had a terrible car crash a few months ago. He broke his back ... He was in a coma for three months!'
Gail sat forward. 'He isn't in a coma now?'
'No,' said Diane, 'he woke up two weeks ago. It's very sad. There's something wrong with him. You know, he thinks he's that rock star ... the famous one ... What's his name?'
'Alex Hayle?' said Gail quietly.
'That's right. Alex ... but how did you know?'
'Oh, nothing,' said Gail. 'Er ... What's the man's name?'
'Richard Tucker. He can't have any visitors either. His brother's a terrible man. He said ...'
'His brother?'
'Yes. He's a friend of Dr Green. Dr Green is the head of the hospital. Anyway, he doesn't want any visitors. Poor Richard! He cut his face badly in the car crash, you know. He looks terrible, but he's a nice man.'
Gail thought for a moment. 'Er ... Diane,' she said, 'I'm looking for a new job. Does your hospital need any new nurses?'
'Yes,' said Diane, 'we always need good nurses. Why? Are you ... ?'
'Can I come and see the hospital?' said Gail.
'All right,' said Diane. 'Come tomorrow. It's Sunday. Dr Green isn't there on Sundays. You can have a look at the hospital. Then maybe you can write to him about a job.'
'Thanks,' said Gail. 'See you tomorrow.'

6 The private hospital

Gail stopped the car and looked at the map. Yes, this was the road, but where was the hospital? It was somewhere near here. There were tall trees on both sides of the road, and there were no houses. She looked at the map again. There was no hospital sign on the road. She started the car and drove slowly along the road. Then she saw a small road on the left. There was a sign on the corner. It was very small: 'Chamford Private Hospital'. Gail turned left and drove along the small road for nearly a mile. Then she could see the hospital. It was a beautiful old house with gardens in front of it.
She drove into the car park and got out of her car. There were several other cars there. They were all expensive - a Rolls Royce, two Mercedes, a Ferrari and a Jaguar. She looked back at her old Mini and smiled. It looked very funny in the middle of all those big cars.

Diane was waiting for her near the door. 'You're late,' she said.

'Yes, sorry,' said Gail, 'I couldn't find it. I like your uniform.'

'Mmm,' said Diane, 'the uniforms are beautiful. They're very expensive, you know. Maybe it was my map. I can't draw maps very well.'

'I needed the map!' said Gail. 'It's a long way from the village.'

'Yes. It's very quiet here. Very quiet. This is the best time of the day for a visit. We always have visitors on Sunday afternoons.'

'But there are never any visitors for your young man with the cut face,' said Gail. 'What's his name?'

'Richard Tucker,' said Diane. 'No, he never has visitors. I told you that yesterday. Come on, I'll show you the hospital.'

They walked round the hospital. Everything was new and very expensive. There were flowers everywhere.

'Er ... Where's Richard Tucker?' Gail asked suddenly. 'Why?' said Diane.

'Oh, I was thinking about him. Can I talk to him for a minute? He doesn't have any visitors. I think that's very sad. He must be very unhappy.'

Diane smiled. 'All right. Dr Green isn't here ... Come on, he's upstairs ... But just for a minute.'

7 'Richard Tucker'

The room was dark. Gail could see a man on the bed. She went to the light. She was going to turn it on.

'No, don't turn on the light ... please.'

She walked over to the bed. She could see his face. It was terrible.

'All right,' she said. 'Hello, Alex.'

'What did you say?'

'Hello, Alex.'

'But ... the doctors call me Richard. That's not my name. I'm Alex Hayle. You called me Alex ...'

'Yes,' said Gail. She looked at him again. Alex was crying.

'Tell me I'm not crazy ... Am I Alex Hayle?'

'Yes,' she said, 'you are.' She sat on the bed and held his hand.

'Why am I here? I can't move ... It's my back ... I broke my back ... Nobody comes here. Why?'

'Have you got any family?' she said.

'Yes, I've got a sister in Australia. Catherine. But she hasn't been here ...'

'She doesn't know,' said Gail. 'Tucker hasn't told her.'
'Tucker? Where's Tucker?' said Alex. 'He can't come in here ... He can't!'

'You're afraid of Tucker.'

Alex was crying again. 'I'm a prisoner,' he said. 'Who are you? You're not with Tucker, are you?'

'No, I'm not,' said Gail. 'You needn't worry. Do you want to get out of here? Really?'

'Yes,' replied Alex quietly.

Gail smiled. 'Don't worry,' she said. 'You're going to be out of here ... and in a real hospital, tomorrow.'

She walked to the door. 'I'll see you tomorrow, Alex. Don't worry.'

Diane was waiting outside. 'Poor Richard,' she said. 'He's crazy.'

'Yes, poor Richard,' said Gail. 'Oh, is there a telephone here? I want to call someone.'

'Yes,' said Diane, 'there's a phone over there.'

Gail walked to the phone, and picked it up. She opened her handbag and took out a piece of paper. She read the number again. Then she pushed the buttons on the phone. That's it! It was ringing. A man answered the phone.

'Hello. This is The Daily News ...'

'Hello,' said Gail. 'Can I speak to a reporter? I've got a story for you ...'